

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at Smith Electric Vehicles in Kansas City, Missouri
July 8, 2010

Hello, everybody. Good to see you. *[Applause]* You don't need to do that. It's good to see you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you so much. Everybody have a seat.

Usually they announce me with some fancy thing, and I think I messed up; I just walked out here. *[Laughter]* So I hope you didn't mind. But on the way out, if you want, we can play the ruffles and flourishes and all that.

I want to, before I start, acknowledge some people who have just done a wonderful job for this area, but also a wonderful job for the country: first of all, one of the best Governors that we've got in the United States of America, Governor Jay Nixon; one of my—not just my favorite Senators, but one of my favorite people and a great friend of mine who is fighting every day for the people of Missouri, Senator Claire McCaskill. We've got two outstanding Members of Congress, one from this side and one from that side, Congressman Emanuel Cleaver and Congressman Dennis Moore. And finally, I just want to acknowledge all the wonderful people at Smith Electric Vehicles and their energetic and outstanding staff.

It is outstanding to be here, and I'm not going to take a long time. I just want to spend some time shaking hands and thanking you for the great work that you've done. I just had a chance to get a tour and saw some of the battery-powered trucks that you're manufacturing. I had a chance to talk to some of the folks who build them. But the reason I'm here today is because at this plant you're doing more than just building new vehicles. You are helping to fight our way through a vicious recession and you are building the economy of America's future.

Now, it's not easy. We've gone through as bad a economic situation as we've had since the Great Depression. And this recession was a culmination of a decade of irresponsibility, a decade that felt like a sledgehammer hitting middle class families. For the better part of 10 years, people have faced stagnant incomes, skyrocketing health care costs, skyrocketing tuition costs, and declining economic security. And this all came to a head in a massive financial crisis that sent our economy into a freefall and cost 8 million American jobs, including many in this community.

So it was in the middle of this crisis that my administration walked through the door, and we had to make some difficult decisions at a moment of maximum peril, to avoid a great depression, to make sure that we didn't have a complete meltdown in our financial system. It was a moment when the markets were in turmoil and we were losing 750,000 jobs every month.

Some of the decisions we made weren't popular at the time, and some of them may still be unpopular today. But we made those decisions because we had to stop that freefall. And because we made those hard choices, our economy is in a different place today than it was just a year ago.

One of those decisions was to provide critical funding to promising, innovative businesses like Smith Electric Vehicles. And because we did, there is a thriving enterprise here instead of an empty, darkened warehouse. Because of the grant that went to this company, we can hear the sounds of machines humming and people doing their work, instead of just the ghostly

silence of an emptied-out building and the memory of workers who were laid off a long time ago.

And we made that kind of decision all across America last year. And we were guided by a simple idea: Government doesn't have all the answers. Ultimately, government doesn't create all the jobs. Government can't guarantee growth by itself. But what government can do is lay the foundation for small businesses to expand and to thrive, for entrepreneurs to open up shop and test out new products, for workers to get the training that they need, and for families to achieve some measure of economic security. And that role is especially important in tough economic times.

And that's why, when my administration began, we immediately cut taxes. That's right. You wouldn't know it from listening to folks, but we cut taxes for working families and for small-business owners all across American to help them weather the storm. Through our small-business loans, and our focus on research and development, and our investment in high-tech, fast-growing sectors like clean energy, we're helping to speed our recovery by harnessing the talent and the drive and the innovative spirit of the American people. So our goal has never been to create another government program, our goal has been to spur growth in the private sector.

For example, right here at Smith, you've recently passed a milestone, hiring a 50th employee, and I know you're on the way to hire 50 more. And we're seeing similar things all across America, with incentives and investments that are creating wind turbines and solar panels. We're seeing investments in energy-efficient appliances and home-building materials and in advanced battery technologies and clean energy vehicles.

So just give you a couple examples, just last week, Abound manufacturing in Colorado received backing for two plants to produce solar panels. This is going to create 2,000 construction jobs and 1,500 permanent jobs. One of the plants is actually taking over what's now an empty Chrysler supplier factory. Another company, called Abengoa Solar, is now planning to build one of the world's largest solar plants right here in the United States. And when it's finished, this facility will be the first large-scale solar plant in the United States that can actually store energy that it creates for later use, even at night.

All told, we expect energy investments alone to generate 700,000 jobs over the next few years. And this is not just going to boost our economy in the short term; this is going to lay a platform for the future. It's going to create opportunities year after year after year, decade after decade after decade, as companies like Smith, that start small, begin to expand. And I was just talking to your CEO, and he says he wants to open up 20 of these all across the country so that in each region you're able to service—Smith is able to service its customers, and they're going to have a reliable sense that Smith is always going to be there for them, making sure that customer satisfaction and performance is high.

I'll give you another example. Just a few years ago, America had the capacity to build only about 2 percent of the world's advanced batteries for electric and hybrid vehicles like Smith's. Two percent, that was it. We account for 25 percent of the world's economy, and we were only making 2 percent of the world's advanced batteries.

But thanks to our new focus on clean energy and the work that's taking place in plants like this one, we could have as much as 40 percent of the world's market by 2015—5 years. That means jobs. But that also means we're going to have an expertise in a sector that's just going to

keep on growing all around the world for years to come. So all these efforts taken together are making a difference.

A year and a half ago, our economy was shrinking at 6 percent a year; now it's growing. The economy was bleeding jobs. We've now created private sector jobs, added private sector jobs, for 6 consecutive months.

Now, obviously, the progress we've made isn't nearly enough to undo all the damage that was done as a consequence of the economic crisis. There's still five unemployed workers for every vacancy. There's still too many empty storefronts on Main Street all across America. And I've said since I took office that my administration will not rest until every American who is able and ready and willing to work can find a job, and a job that pays a decent wage and has decent benefits to support a family.

We're not there yet. We've got a long way to go. But what is absolutely clear is we're moving in the right direction. We are headed in the right direction. And that's—the surest way out of this storm is to go forward, not to go backwards. There are some people who argue that we should abandon some of these efforts, some people who make the political calculation that it's better to just say no to everything than to lend a hand to clean up the mess that we've been in.

But my answer to those who don't have confidence in our future, who want to stop, my answer is come right here to Kansas City. Come see what's going on at Smith Electric. I think they're going to be hard-pressed to tell you that you're not better off than you would be if we hadn't made the investments in this plant.

For the naysayers, they ought to travel all across America and meet the people that I've met at places like Navistar in Indiana where folks are being hired to build new electric trucks; or Siemens wind power in Iowa where they're making wind turbines in a factory that used to be empty just like this one; or Celgard, which is a battery technology company in North Carolina that hired more than 50 people because of the investments we made; or POET biorefinery here in Missouri that's putting people to work harvesting homegrown energy.

While they're at it, they ought to talk to all the small-business owners who've gotten tax breaks to pay for their health plans and new SBA loans to expand or keep their doors open, and that includes tens of millions of dollars in loans for companies right here in Kansas City.

Or they ought to talk to the crews that are rebuilding all the highways and laying tracks for new rail lines, including road projects that are putting hundreds of people to work in this area. They ought to talk to the scientists who are toiling day and night to develop the technologies and the cures with the potential to improve our economy and our health and our well-being.

And they might want to talk to the teachers who didn't get laid off because of the budget help that we gave the State of Missouri, who are then going to be teaching our kids, and they're being incentivized to reform how they do business so we've got the best education system in the world, and we've got the highest number of folks who are going to community colleges or 4-year colleges than anyplace in the world.

That's how we're going to take charge of our destiny. That's how we create jobs and create lasting growth. That's how we ensure that America doesn't just limp along, maybe recover to where we were before, but instead that we're prospering, that this Nation leads the industries of the future.

I mean, this has been a difficult time for America right now: 2 years of brutal recession, a decade of economic insecurity. And there are going to be some hard days ahead. That's the truth. It's going to take a while for us to dig ourselves out of this hole. But what you are proving here—each and every one of you who work here at Smith Electric—is the promise of a brighter future. What you're proving is that if we hold fast to that spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation that's always defined America, we're not just going to emerge from this period of turmoil; we're going to emerge stronger than we were before.

You're proving that as long as we keep on moving forward, nobody can stop us. And for that I want to thank you. You are setting a model for what we need to be doing all across the country.

So congratulations. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon of Missouri; and Bryan Hansel, president and chief executive officer, Smith Electric Vehicles, U.S. Corp. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Smith Electric Vehicles U.S. Corporation in Kansas City, MO.

Locations: Kansas City, MO.

Names: Cleaver, Emanuel, II; Hansel, Bryan; McCaskill, Claire; Moore, Dennis; Nixon, Jeremiah W. "Jay".

Subjects: Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Market volatility; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Teachers; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Battery technology for hybrid automobiles; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Health and medical care : Small businesses, tax credits to purchase insurance coverage; Missouri : Governor; Missouri : President's visit; Missouri : Smith Electric Vehicles U.S. Corporation in Kansas City; Science and technology : Research and development; Small Business Administration : Loan guarantee facility; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : High-speed rail lines, development and expansion; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Treasury, Department of the : Consumer and Business Lending Initiative.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000583.